

A Weekly Byte... from Isralight

(portion of Korach)

Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality

From Rav Binny

This week has been a difficult week. Three of our sons, Naftali, Gilad and Eyal, have been missing since last Thursday night and despite the best efforts of the Israeli army, the Police, the intelligence community, and rescue units, we seem no nearer, as of this writing, to learning their whereabouts.

The only thing that seems clear, is that they have been kidnapped by a terrorist group, and one can only imagine the circumstances under which they are be'ezrat Hashem (with G-d's help) alive and being held captive.

So many questions are once again on everyone's minds: Why do they hate us so? What avenue best to pursue? Is peace even possible with enemies who would kidnap 16 year old boys?

This week we read the portion of *Korach* whose central theme seems to be rebellion, even insurrection. But the theme of conflict with Moshe and Aaron's leadership seems to have been a theme for the past few weeks. Beginning with the Jews who complained about missing their meat delicacies in the desert (Be'ha'alotcha), continuing with the spies' determination not to enter the land in the sin of the spies (Shlach last week) and on to the conflicts in this week's portion *Korach*, one senses a progression of challenges. And yet, this week, something is different. The response to Korach and his close followers' insurrection is not exile as in last week's response to the sin of the spies, nor plague or delayed consequence. This week, Korach and his followers are completely swallowed up by the earth, suggesting that the basis of their debate has absolutely no place in the Jewish dialogue. Why was Korach's challenge to Moshe and Aaron's leadership so great as to warrant such a severe response?

Interestingly, in what might have been equally perceived as a challenge to Moshe & Aaron's leadership, in the portion of *Be'ha'alotcha*, (which we read only two weeks ago) Moshe's (and G-d's) reaction seems very different. In response to Moshe's struggle with the people's complaining and rebellious nature, G-d tells Moshe to gather seventy elders who will then be given (via Moshe himself) the gift of Prophecy. In order to choose these seventy elders, lots are drawn and six from each tribe (of the twelve aside from Levi) are chosen, leaving two extra prophets.

These two prophets (Eldad and Meidad) do not join the seventy elders convened by Moshe, remaining instead in the camp and prophesying nonetheless. And this seems to have been perceived by Joshua (and possibly Moshe's son Gershom) as some threat of insurrection against the leadership of Moshe. Yet, in that instance, Moshe does not seem at all perturbed suggesting it would be wonderful if the entire Jewish people would prophesy, in the camp or anywhere else. And apparently (given that He has allowed the spirit of prophecy to rest on them) G-d agrees! Why the difference in these two cases? Rav Yonatan Saks, former Chief Rabbi of the U.K., suggests in an article that these two cases exhibit two entirely different issues at hand.

The story of Eldad and Meidad is all about *influence*, whereas the story of Korach and his followers is all about *power*. Influence is our desire to make a difference in the world; when I am interested in influencing, it's not about me; it's about being a vehicle to make the world better for everyone else. Power on the other hand is all about me; that's why power cannot be shared without being diffused. If one shares power one also loses power. On the other hand, as Rabbi Saks so eloquently suggests, influence

increases when it is shared. If we are really interested in influencing others, then the more we share the more of an influence we can have.

In the army, of a necessity there was a power structure, part of whose aim was control and the success of any and every particular mission. As such, there can be only one commander, and sharing command is never a good idea. A ship can only have one captain.

At Yeshivat Orayta, on the other hand, as an example, our interest is all about sharing the way we look at the world and influencing our students' ability to make a difference in the world. As such, the more teachers and educators can share in this role, the more everyone gains. More teachers means more, not less influence, hence the value of our recent decision to have Rav Yitzchak Blau join us as an additional Rosh Yeshiva, increasing our ability to share Orayta's unique approach towards Jewish living and learning. And therein lays the rub. Judaism has never been about power, and while sometimes, especially in the context of a Jewish state there is a need for power structures (such as Kings, when there can be only one) we have always been about influence; born of a mission to be a light and to share with the world an ethical model that can make everyone's world a better place to be. We are not interested in ruling the world and never have been; we just want to be a beacon of light to influence the entire world to see and build towards a better future.

Our enemies however, particularly in the world of fanatical Islamic fundamentalism, are absolutely all about power. They want Islam to rule the world (after which they intend to rule all Muslims), and there is absolutely no room whatsoever for anyone else, with any other opinion. If you are a Shiite, the Sunni Muslim is your enemy and visa-versa and there is no room for Christians in the Muslim world (witness the persecution of the Copts in Egypt, or the near disappearance of Christians in Bethlehem, the cradle of Christianity, ever since the Palestinian Authority took over in Bethlehem).

And the greatest enemy of this power based approach is Judaism, with its belief that a small group can change the world. This is not all that different from Hitler's suggestion, in *Mein Kampf*, that he could never forgive the Jews for introducing to the world the idea of an objective morality which was antithetical to his 'might makes right' approach to the rise of the Germanic Aryan race.

Which leaves us to consider the idea that this week, there is no room for compromise; Korach, who was interested in power, for power's sake, must be swallowed up in the earth and completely removed from the dialogue, before the world can move on.

Our enemies who would kidnap our 16 year old boys, murder our infants with a sniper's rifle and blow up our elderly and our children while they sit for ice cream in a Pizza store, are not about influence. They want power; absolute power. No two state solution would ever satisfy them. Hamas will not sit with us because they are fighting a war, and there can be no peace until one side wins the war, and the other side surrenders. We may think we have won our wars, but as long as our enemies believe they were only battles we are not ready for peace.

In modern times no peace agreement has ever been successfully negotiated until one side won and the other side lost the conflict. They know we are fighting a war; we need to be sure we do what is necessary to win it. And the terrorists who kidnap our children?; None of the children, Arab or Jewish or anyone else, will be safe until we figure out how to swallow them up in the earth for good, just like Korach.

May G-d hear our prayers, and may we soon witness the safe return of these three boys, and may we soon experience a world where nation will no longer lift up sword against nation and there will be no more war.

Shabbat Shalom,
Binny Freedman